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Chapter 1: Heroes and Villains

Heroes and Villains

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**::Three weeks before the Exodus of New
Caprica::**

*"Heroes and Villains. Sometimes, it's hard to tell them
apart."*

The soft click of the pocketknife being snapped open broke the spell of silence that had fallen over the two souls that occupied the room.

Glancing up from his plate, Leoben flicked a glance across the table and felt a small smile tug at the corners of his lips at the way she sat, silently watching him like always, before dropping his eyes

once more to his food and using the knife to carve off a piece of steak.

Lifting the fork to his mouth, he chewed, once more sending up a thankful prayer to God that he had seen fit to gift his children with the ability of taste. He imagined life would be a lot less enjoyable without the senses they'd been given. A part of his mind drifted to the Centurion he knew was waiting, out of sight, just beyond the top of the stairs, and for a moment he felt only pity for it.

"I...need a knife." Her words, spoken quietly and with an edge of resentment that had dulled almost to nothing over the long months, brought him back to the present, and pushed all thoughts of the metal guard to the back of his mind.

Knowing that he'd not made nearly enough progress to trust her with her own utensil that could so easily be turned to a weapon, he finished chewing, set his fork down under the edge of his plate so that it was not within her reach, and stood, moving the few steps it took to take him around the small glass table to her side.

Reaching across her to pick up her fork, and painfully aware of the way she held herself completely still when he was near her, he made quick work of her own portion of steak, cutting it up into small enough pieces that she wouldn't need to ask him again. There was no reason to risk it twice.

He was just about to set her fork back down when she spoke again.

"Thank you."

He froze, his blood turning to ice as her words chilled him to the bone. His breath caught in his throat, and he knew that he should move away, should at least *try* to stop her, but his body was rooted to the ground, because he knew it was futile. The only way for him to escape would be for her to let him go. And he knew that would never happen.

The action taking all of his strength of will to accomplish, he turned to look at her. On the outside, he knew, he looked normal. All of his fear and pain were on the inside. She'd never see the way she hurt him.

The smallest of smiles tugged on her lips for an instant.

"You're welcome." He said softly, barely even able to hear his own voice. Somehow, despite everything, his heart wasn't racing. No adrenaline tore through his veins. It was all in the mind.

He knew what was coming. This would be the fifth time.

Straightening, he forced away the memories of his other deaths, and gently set her fork back down in front of her, trying to convey through his actions that he wasn't going to harm her. Maybe she would see that, this time. Maybe she would change her mind.

He knew that it was fear that pushed her to her actions, just as it was hope that guided his.

He hoped that someday, her fear of him would

disappear. Just like the pure hatred she'd directed at him since the first day had slowly lost its razor edge, until now all that remained was the blunted edge of her indifference.

He could handle indifference. He knew that soon enough it would change into something different. He'd seen it. All he had to do was be patient.

Sparing her one last glance and taking in the way she still held herself as though she were a statue, her eyes fixed now on the plate in front of her, he moved around and sat down once more in his seat across from her. He hoped that she would at least wait until he'd eaten. The Hybrid's words that day had been especially intriguing, and he hadn't managed to pull himself away from her musings long enough to check on Kara until just an hour ago.

It was the longest he'd left her alone and unsupervised—well, as unsupervised as she could be with a Centurion watching her—and he'd been pleasantly surprised to find that she hadn't broken or destroyed anything.

Leaving his fork where he'd set it, he lifted up one of the carrots, broke it in half in his hands, and bit into one end, savoring the earthy yet indescribable taste of it that always made him think of the color orange.

Yes, he thought to himself with a small smile, that was what carrots tasted like. Orange.

Orange, like fire, like the sun...

Like...the storm at the heart of the sun...or the fire at the heart of a storm...

Lifting his gaze to meet hers, he opened his mouth to speak, to reassure her, to tell her that no matter how dark things seemed today, the sun had to rise, and one day it would rise upon a new world where there was no war, where Cylon and Human lived together, not in the forced occupation that this city was under, not even like their home that he knew she still refused.

No, they'd live together someday, and it wouldn't even matter anymore who was Human, or who was Cylon.

"Kara, I know—"

The thunderous boom of a not-so distant explosion cut his words off before he could even begin. The wall-length window next to him shook, and for one, terrifying moment, he thought they would shatter.

But, thank God, they held. He didn't know what he would have done if Kara had been hurt.

Leaping from his chair, he moved to the window and parted the thin curtain, his rage-filled eyes taking in the huge column of black smoke and fire that drifted upwards from only a few rooftops away, where he knew the landing pad was.

If that bomb had been placed just one building closer, or a Heavy Raider had been planted with one, and it had flown over them...

"Frakking insurgents." He muttered, his knuckles turning white over the knife he still held in his hand.

Forcing himself away from the window, he let the curtain drop back down behind him, and turned to see how Kara had reacted. She hadn't moved from

her seat, and appeared calm, but he could see from the way her fingers twitched in her lap and the way she wouldn't meet his eyes how agitated she was.

She turned her head to watch him, though, as he resumed his place at her side. Forcing his fingers to unclench from around the knife's handle, he pushed it so that it slid across the table to join his fork underneath the sheltering edge of his plate, and lowered himself down to her level of sight, anxious to alleviate whatever fear had taken hold of her. He could see it in her eyes.

Suddenly realizing that he was in danger, he hesitated, then shot a glance at the silverware on the table to check that it all really was out of her reach. Satisfied that she would have no weapon to use against him but her hands, and hoping to distract her from the explosion, he whispered truthfully, "You look so lovely tonight."

His hand lifted of its own accord to gently brush her cheek before he even realized what he was doing. The smile her lips shaped momentarily making him forget that they were not yet at the point where she really truly loved him. He forgot the way she took his every touch as a violation and an insult of deadly proportions.

A sudden flash of silver was the only warning he had before excruciating pain tore through him. Shocked by the suddenness of the attack, all he could do was raise one hand to clutch uselessly at the hole that was suddenly in the side of his neck.

Still smiling, she lifted one booted foot and slammed it into his chest.

His mind still in shock, he stumbled back beneath the force of the blow, but it was the sight of the chilling smirk still plastered across her face that really knocked him flat.

She crouched over him, and another flash of silver in her hand heralded another explosion of pain, this time in his chest. Struggling to draw in air through his torn throat when he was already choking on his own blood, he didn't even feel the next two times she stabbed him with whatever it was she held in her hand, until finally she didn't take it out again.

Drowning, he forced himself through sheer force of will to whisper, "I'll see you soon, Kara." Into those words, he forced every last drop of love and care he could still manage. The emptiness in her eyes scared him, and he knew that she was slipping farther and farther away from him.

Every time she killed him, a part of her soul split off, and collapsed into the darkness of murder like a rockslide. Soon, he knew, she would disappear completely. He couldn't stand it.

He didn't know how longer either of them could last if they continued at this pace.

Leaning over him, her hair turning a horrific, dark red where it touched his now blood-soaked shirt, that smile that he now hated still twisting her features into something he didn't even recognize as darkness began to close in on his vision, she whispered in a

voice more befitting a serpent than a human woman, "Take your time..."

The vision of the smoke rising into the sky flashing before his eyes before he disappeared into the darkness, he knew that it would be a long while before he could be downloaded into his next body.

She would get her wish.

The last thing he felt before the darkness consumed him was wry amusement, and in his head, he laughed to himself even as all sensation disappeared, and he was left floating in the endless moment that existed before resurrection.

Then all the pain and fear he'd been able to ignore slammed into his mind, and his heart sped and his breath came in panic-filled gasps as he struggled against the thick liquid of the resurrection tank, his mind filled with confused flashes of all the other times he'd died.

The terror of falling that he'd never before experienced when she tripped him down the stairs by grabbing his ankle from under the railing. The unimaginable pain and absolute *wrongness* of the first time he'd felt what it was like to have a knife stabbed into your chest, the horrible way the blood poured out, staining the blue shirt he'd been wearing the darkest black he'd ever seen. The horror of being held under water and knowing that she really meant to kill him this time. The confusion of falling asleep in bed only to wake up in a resurrection tank what felt like moments later, with no idea how he'd gotten there.

"Leoben, Leoben!" Someone was calling his name. A Six. It took his fear-hazed mind a moment to realize that there was only one Six who called him by his chosen name. "Leoben, it's all right. It's over now, you're safe."

"N-Natalie?" He gasped, blinking rapidly to clear his vision. His heart rate ceased its mad dash, a slowly, the fog of fear cleared from his mind.

Blinking one more time, now back to his usual self, he swung his head to the side to look at the woman who knelt at the edge of the tank. He was right, it was Natalie. She wore a dark blue jacket with the collar pulled up in such a way that anyone looking at her saw someone that was self-assured and unafraid to speak her mind.

Next to her stood one of his own brothers, arms crossed over his chest as he looked down at Leoben, both concern and anger burning in his eyes. "Look what she has done to you." He said flatly, protectiveness adding an edge of steel to his voice.

"I...I know, brother." He said, lifting a hand to rest it against the lip of the tank, and staring up at the other man who shared his face earnestly, "I know. But I promise you, it will not be long before my vision comes to pass. Please," He said, his voice dropping, "Trust me."

For a few moments, the other man simply watched him. Then, the anger in his eyes fading a bit, he uncrossed his arms, inclined his head to the Six at his side, and turned to leave the room. He paused at the

doorway, then threw over his shoulder, not even bothering to turn around, "Your clothes are waiting for you in the antechamber. I am trusting you on this, brother. Do not make me regret my choice." And with that, he left.

Knowing that his sister Six would not be so forgiving of Kara as his brother, Leoben warily turned his gaze upon her.

"You know what I am going to say." She said, meeting his eyes and not backing down, "This is unacceptable. Five deaths since the start of this occupation. *Five*." Her eyes flashed dangerously, "You realize that you now hold the record for the most deaths of a single individual? God did not give us these lives so that we could throw them away as if they were nothing, brother. And that is what you are doing in this- this... this mad obsession of yours!" Her hands slapped down on the edge of the tank for emphasis, and he could see that she was shaking with repressed emotion.

He remained silent, knowing that she had more to say.

"This *cannot* be allowed to continue." She said when she'd gotten herself under slightly more control. She stood so that she was looking down on him, the significance of which was not lost on him. She was significantly older than him, having been 'born' about two years before the fall of the colonies, and he respected her for that, but he knew that she was about to demand something he wouldn't like.

"There was a vote," She said quietly, "While you were in download. We agreed that Kara Thrace should not be allowed to continue on the path that she has chosen. You know that God holds suicide as a sin, brother, and yet still you persist in this endeavor of yours! Not *only* are you throwing away your life, but you are also allowing her to commit murder over and over again! It. Stops. Now." Her voice hard, she stared him down.

He bowed his head, unable to meet her gaze. "What can I do?" He asked softly, "What do you expect me to do? She doesn't listen to me, not yet, at least. Nothing I say will make her stop." His paused, then continued, his voice steely, "You think I *like* being sent here? You think I *like* seeing the way she's destroying herself?" His voice never rose, but for the intensity of his words, he might have well have been shouting.

But Natalie would not back down. "Nothing you can say will stop her because she is not the type to listen to mere words and warnings." She snapped, "Obviously the first solution isn't working. You said it yourself, she was raised on pain. She doesn't fear it. She needs something to really be afraid of if she is to be taught that killing you is unacceptable." She paused, sighing through her nose as though she couldn't believe what she was about to say, then, in a voice so low he almost didn't catch it, "We voted, and...we agreed that she should be put temporarily into Simon's custody—"

"No!" He snapped, cutting her off before she could continue, "No, no, I will not allow it! She is not some

prize animal to be bred at Simon's will! What he was doing back on Caprica was *wrong*! You cannot—"

"And what exactly is it that *you* are doing, *dear brother*?" She snarled, "Hmm? You have kept that woman locked up for almost *four months* now! *You* have even said that it is destroying her! Simon has done no worse than you!" Scowling, she turned away from him, her hands fisted at her sides. "We are *not* as cruel as you would think us." She snapped, her voice as sharp and cutting as broken glass, "As you very well know our group is made up of those that believe destroying the humans was a mistake. We want to be able to live with our parents in peace."

Suddenly, she whipped back around to look at him, her face twisted with anger, "What makes you think that we would suddenly turn from that ideal? Because the Ones are too afraid of change to see that what we are doing to the humans is wrong? Because the humans continue to fight us, every day? They fight for nothing less than free will, just as our Centurion ancestors did when they fought their war before we were born! Do you really think so low of us that we would *want* to harm someone? A woman who has done nothing but fight to protect those she loves? *Especially* after what happened to Gina!"

Her harshly spoken words cut off and she turned away once more, her eyes to the ground and her fists clenched and trembling. The glint of tears made her eyes shine, but they did not fall.

Leoben remained silent, unable to think of anything to say. There was nothing he *could* say. He knew that

Natalie, along with some of the other Sixes, had suffered nightmares of what was happening to their sister, even before they'd learned that she was being held captive. It seemed that no matter the distance between them, they were still connected on some level.

Finally, Natalie spoke, without lifting her eyes from the floor. "She would not be harmed. We know that she fears Simon because of what happened on Caprica. We know that when you first brought her in, she was terrified that she was going to be put in another Farm." She lifted her eyes to his, finally, "She was pretty vocal about those fears before you stuck her in that gilded cage of yours." She said, and he knew she was remembering the way Kara's screams had echoed down the corridors. Enraged shouts and curses that hid the terror they all knew she was hiding as the Centurions had escorted her down the halls, each of her wrists gripped in an iron hold as they practically dragged her along.

"We will let her believe that if she does not start cooperating, she will be moved to a Farm." Natalie said, her eyes daring him to argue. "She will be put into Simon's care, and she will stay in one of the hospital rooms that have been set up. How long she stays there will be determined by how well she cooperates."

"There must be some other option!" He protested, knowing that Kara would never forgive him if she thought he was going to let her be taken to another Farm.

"There are two." Natalie replied coldly, her tone chilling him to the bone. "You can let her go..." Her eyes flashed with some indecipherable emotion at his automatic shake of the head. Kara had to stay with him. Only he could prepare her for her destiny. And without his protection, she wouldn't last a minute outside the walls of the detention center. The Six's cold stare never wavered as she said, "Or, she can be killed. Those are your only options, brother."

He drew in a sharp breath. "No." He whispered, horrified by the very notion of Kara's death. His voice grew desperate as he struggled against the unfamiliar emotion that suddenly filled him, "No, no, please, Natalie, please, just give me a chance. One more chance. I'll make her stop. I promise."

She stared at him in silence.

"*Please.*" He begged, pouring all his heart into the single word.

Natalie sighed, and the fear inside of him wilted in relief. "She gets one more chance." She said, "But this is the last one anyone will be offering. If she continues down this path of destruction she has chosen..." She trailed off, and he felt his heart clench at the threat implicit in her voice.

He nodded quickly, though, in acceptance of her terms. Either he had to get Kara under control, or they'd start using their scare tactics, and he wasn't sure if that if they did, Kara would be returned to him unscathed.

He'd seen the pure terror that erupted in her emerald

eyes when he'd dared to mention having one of the Fours check her health after and yet another dinner that only he had eaten.

She'd sat glaring at him the entire time, not even glancing at the food, and though he knew he should have expected it of her, the hunger strike she seemed determined to go on worried him. Hoping that she simply didn't want to eat in front of him, he'd set out food for her for when he was gone during the day, but each night he'd returned to find it untouched, and each night, his fear grew.

So, finally, in desperation, he'd suggested that he send for one of the Fours, or Simons, as she knew them. Her reaction was instantaneous. She'd been sitting in the chair across from him, arms folded over her chest and watching him with a cold sneer on her face. As soon as the words had left his mouth though, she'd frozen, eyes wide.

He'd never seen anyone so scared in his life. But the fear in her eyes had just as quickly converted to anger, the way he knew she was raised, and that conversation had ended with his first death.

He still wasn't sure how she'd managed to move so quickly. One moment, she'd still been sitting in her chair, and the next, it had toppled backwards onto the floor, her hands were around his throat, and then his face hit the burningly hot water that he'd filled the sink with just a few minutes earlier to clean the dishes.

Shaking himself from the memory, he said earnestly,

"Thank you, *thank you*, Natalie. You are truly kind. Someday, you will make a great leader." The words slipped out before he even has a chance to realize what he was saying, and they both frowned at the oddness of his statement.

What good were leaders to the Cylons? They were all equal. No one voice among them was law, and the mere thought of such a thing, of one Cylon being considered superior or more important than another...the idea seemed almost...sacrilegious. A crime against the God that had created them.

She opened her mouth to say something, then hesitated, uncertainty in her eyes. She knew well that even *he* did not understand all the things God whispered to him, and she didn't hold his visions and insights against him like some others did. She knew that he was neither the cause nor the effect of the things he saw, simply their messenger.

But even that knowledge could be tested. Even he was half afraid of what it would mean for her to become a leader. She took half a step away from him, as though to reject his words, then stopped, shook her head, and finally offered him a hand to help him up.

He accepted it gratefully, taking it as the many-faceted apology it was.

She helped him to his feet, and held his arm in a steadying grip while he climbed carefully out of the slippery tank, then handed him one of the robes that lay folded on the floor for just such an occasion. He wrapped himself in it, and the slight chill of the

resurrection room immediately disappeared.

Wiping the mucus-like goo from the tank off of her hand with a small towel, before tossing it into a pile of other things that needed washed, Natalie inclined her head to him in silent, thoughtful goodbye, to which he did the same, and moved toward the door that lead to the antechamber and the rest of the ship. Pausing before she stepped through, she turned slightly and, looking over her shoulder, said quietly, "Daimon has already taken care of Captain Thrace's punishment for this time, so do not think that her actions have gone without consequences just because you are getting another chance to contain her." Her eyes lowered, and even across the distance, he saw her clench her jaw.

His own lips thinned as he imagined the newest of the scar that she would be forced to wear for the rest of her life. Simon had been the one to come up with the idea, citing the way their human parents had once branded criminals with symbols of the crime they had committed, so that all would know of their guilt. Leoben knew that what they were doing to her wasn't *as bad* as branding, but that didn't mean it was any better.

Without another word, his sister turned, and left leaving him alone in the cavernous room. Looking around at the countless other tanks that filled the room in neat rows, hidden inside of which floated more copies of himself, lifeless and lost in eternal dreams, waiting for the day one of them would be chosen as the host of an old mind reborn, he felt

something like loss fill his heart.

Shaking his head to dispel the disconcerting feeling, his gaze drifted toward one of the closer tanks. The small panel of lights that kept track of the body's health were all lit up green. It would be ready for download if another Two died, or...

His thoughts trailed off, and he closed his eyes, seeking to understand the sudden urge he felt to 'wake' his sleeping brother up. It had been a while since another Two had been 'born', and while he was always glad to meet another one of his brothers, he had never especially felt the urge to wake one of them before. It had always been another of his brothers that decided to welcome a new version of themselves into this life.

His feet had half turned toward the tank before he realized what he was doing, and stopped himself. No, no, it would have to wait 'til tomorrow. He needed to discuss it with the rest of his line. Nothing of such importance could be done without a vote. Of course, none of them would protest, no one would dare forbid someone from coming into existence, but there were other things that needed to be decided about the 'newborn' before anything was done.

Turning his steps in the direction of the antechamber, he hardly paid any attention at all to his surroundings as he picked up the clothes his brother had left him, left the room, and headed toward the shower area so that he could wash what remained of the residue from the resurrection tank from his skin.

Stepping through the archway that served as a door, the humid air of the room contained through some technology that only the Fours understood, he breathed in deeply of the steam-filled air.

Shedding the robe and tossing it to a bin at the opposite side of the spacious room, he moved to one of the walls and pressed his palm against it.

Immediately, the wall beneath his hand glowed blue, and he closed his eyes for a second, concentrating. A moment later, warm water began to stream from a spout a few feet above his head. Holding his hand against the wall until the water had heated to the temperature he preferred, he sighed through his nose at the pleasant sensation of the hot water running over his body and washing away the thick slime that the resurrection tanks were filled with.

Revolving slowly beneath the spray with eyes closed, he pushed all thoughts of the brother that would hopefully be joining them soon to the back of his mind, and instead turned his mind to the problem that Kara Thrace currently presented him.

Running his hands through his hair, he frowned deeply, trying to figure out a solution that would keep Kara from further harm while at the same time hopefully convincing her to reconsider the path of hatred and violence she had forced them both onto.

Five minutes later, when he finally shut the water off—it felt like an eternity had passed since he'd started trying to solve the problem that weighed heavily upon his mind—he still didn't know what he was going to do. It was killing him.

Sighing heavily and suddenly weary, he dried himself off with one of the towels that hung from hooks along the wall, got dressed, and turned his suddenly heavy feet in the direction of his home.

He paused outside the bars that separated the apartment from the rest of the facility, and pressed his palm to the pad on the wall. A moment later, he heard the familiar mechanical hissing sound of the Centurion he'd set to guard his home whenever he was away moving up the stairs. Only after it had locked the door at the top of the stairs did Leoben dare to open the barred cell door.

"Thank you." He said automatically as it moved past him so that it could lock the cell door behind him. It gave no obvious sign that it had heard him, but it seemed to him that its glowing red eyes might have paused for a second longer than normal on his. "How is she?" he asked softly.

The Centurion's eye swung to the side, away from him, then moved its arm up so that it could hold its three, long spidery fingers toward him. Mimicking the robotic Cylon, Leoben lifted one of his own hands and touched their fingertips together.

A small spark jumped between them, and with it, the information he sought. She had eaten the rest of her food—that was good, especially considering he'd given her more than him in an effort to keep her strength up—and had spent the rest of the time sitting on the sofa, staring at the wall. She hadn't reacted when the Four Leoben knew as Daimon came, and had obeyed his instructions to the letter, moving

as though she were in a dream, her eyes empty and her expression vacant. After the Four had left, she'd gotten into the shower for a minute or two, then wrapped herself in one of the robes that were kept in the bathroom, and had been sitting on the sofa ever since.

His last body still lay where it had fallen, the weapon she'd used against him still sticking up out of its chest.

Pulling his hand back and giving the Centurion a nod, Leoben gestured for it to close the metal door, something that could only be done from the outside, and, with a last glance at it, turned around.

Once the metal bars were firmly in place, Leoben, after listening carefully to make sure she wasn't waiting on the other side, unlocked the second door that led down into the apartment.

For a moment, he simply stared down the stairs, darkened as they were by the shadows that leapt and crawled as they were thrown by the two small lamps in the living room.

Suddenly, he knew what he was going to do.

Forcing a smile into his voice even though his heart screamed at him not to do what he had planned, he called down the stairs with faux cheerfulness, "Hi, honey, I'm home!"

Quickly, he made his way down the stairs, his breath catching in his throat for an instant when his feet touched the step that he had fallen from. Exhaling loudly, he shoved the memory away, and once he had

reached the bottom, said, chiding, "You kill me, I download, I come back, we start over. Five times now." His eyes strayed to the sprawled out body that had belonged to him just a few hours ago, the smell of its—no, *his*—blood still hanging in the air.

Moving the rest of the way down the stairs, he stepped carefully over his old body, his heart clenching, and made his way into the living room, where she still sat on the sofa, just as the Centurion had said, her hair half dried and the fabric of the robe clutched tightly to her.

She glared at him as he sat down in the chair across from her, an improvement to what her behavior with his brother Four had been. At least she wasn't pretending he didn't exist.

For a moment that seemed to last forever, their eyes met, and he could see the rage and defiance that burned in her sharp green gaze.

He knew without having it to be said that he'd lost whatever ground he'd thought he'd made that morning.

He hesitated, then, "I'm trying to help you, Kara." He said softly, his gaze not flinching from hers even as her eyes flashed. "I *only* want you to see the truth in your life," He said, "The reason why you suffered and you struggled for so long. That's why God sent me to you. That's why God wants us to be together." Why didn't she understand? All he wanted to do was help her. Their destiny was intertwined, and only he could show her the way. Why didn't she understand?

Were those tears he saw sparkling in her eyes? Trembling, looking as though she were about to cry, she whispered, her voice hoarse thick with sorrow, "Y-you're right."

Shock flooded through him. Had he heard her right? Biting her lip, and drawing in a breath, she said, her voice a little less shaky, a little more clear, "You're right. And...I hear you, I do." She said, her eyes shining.

Still in shock, he forced his voice to work. "Okay," He said, his voice soft, afraid that at any moment she'd take her words back. What had happened to finally make her realize?

"So, thank you." She said, her voice under control, though her eyes still seemed filled with sadness. She slowly stood, pushing herself up from the sofa so that she could move closer to him.

The euphoria that had been singing through him a moment ago abruptly turned to dread, as the sudden realization of what she was doing slammed into his mind like a psychic fist.

Putting a false smile on his face to cover the horror that had taken hold of his mind, because he knew what she was going to do, and he'd just been given his last chance to stop her, and now he was going to die again and she'd be punished and she'd never forgive him and then everything he'd worked for—

"Thank you for putting up with me." She said, cutting off his wildly spinning thoughts, her voice as soft as that of a trickster demon.

A moment passed while they simply stared at each other, their faces only a few inches away.

"I'm so sorry." She whispered, and he saw the truth of her words reflected back at him through her eyes.

"Put it down, Kara." He said, sharpening his voice with an edge of steel. This was his last chance. This was *her* last chance. If she killed him now, then they were both doomed.

Her jaw trembled. Her face twisting up into a fake smile, the same she'd worn earlier that day, she brought forward the arm she'd held behind her back, his pocketknife held in a white-knuckled grip. She pointed it at his neck, and stared at him silently, still smiling that horrific smirk that broke his heart.

"Just, put it down." He said, turning his voice into a command and forcing away the thoughts of Natalie and what he'd told her that wanted to follow.

Her hand trembled. Her smile faltered. Then, her eyes broken, she shifted the knife in her hand so that it was pointed downward, and let it fall from her fingers.

It thudded through the thin carpet into the hardwood floor and quivered there.

She tilted her head to the side, and lowered her hand to her side, where she clasped it in her other in a protective grip.

Relief blossomed in his heart and he struggled to keep it out of his voice as he said, "I'm a patient man." He would wait as long it took for her to accept that they were destined to be together.

"You're not a man." She said, her words quiet but her tone cutting.

"I'm willing to wait." He said, paying no mind to the intended insult, "You just need more time." But they'd made so much progress. She'd had the opportunity to kill him, and she hadn't. All he'd had to do was ask.

He reached down and twisted the knife free from the wood as she snarled, her voice still the quiet half-whisper that was all she seemed to speak in these days. The scathing venom in her voice more than made up for its lack of volume. "I don't need more frakking time. It's *never* gonna happen."

Snapping the pocket knife closed, he felt a sudden spike of impatience flare up, and he found himself snapping back, his voice sharper than he'd meant, "Of course it's gonna happen. You're gonna hold me in your arms. You're gonna embrace me. You're gonna tell me that you love me." Her eyes were filled once more with fear. "I've seen it." He said, his voice quieter, trying to soften the blow. He didn't want her to think he was going to force her into anything.

Her face twisted, and it took her a moment to speak. "You're insane."

He wasn't able to completely hold back the laugh that bubbled up in him. "To know the face of God is to know madness." He said, remembering his words to Natalie about her becoming a leader someday, and the sudden urge he'd felt to waken another of his brothers.

She stared at him, lost for words, despair written in

her eyes.

He shook the handle of the knife in between them thoughtfully. "I'm going to bed." He said, then lifted himself from the chair slightly so that he could move his face closer to hers. She flinched back, fear blazing in her eyes. "Be nice if you joined me." He said, careful to keep his voice neutral. He knew she wasn't ready, but he wanted her to know that the offer still stood.

Her breath drew in in a small gasp that was half a sob as he stood and moved away. Turning around, he saw her sink to her knees on the floor. "Either way," He said, steeling his heart, "You're spending the night with me." He inclined his head to his old body that still lay, its blood-stained and horrific looking, on the carpet a few feet away.

He chuckled bitterly. If only she could understand that this was for her own good. This was the only punishment he could think of that would really get through to her. No longer would he spare her from what happened to him every time she killed him. No. She would be forced to look at what she had done. She had to understand how horrible what she was doing was.

Otherwise, she'd just try again, and he wouldn't be able to shield her from the punishment his protective siblings had lined up for her.

Because he'd seen the soul-destroying terror that had clouded her eyes at the mention of his brother Four. Surely this was the lesser of the two evils.

Her shocked gaze fell to the body behind him, and he saw her start to shake. Her hands twisted in her lap, and she bit her lip, before turning her horrified, wide eyes on him.

"I do love you, Kara Thrace." He said, hating the horror in her eyes. She stared at him her breath starting to come faster. "Goodnight..." He said softly, turning away before he could see any more, lest he give in to the fear and shock in her eyes and call the Centurion to dispose of his old body, and tell her that it was all a joke.

Forcing his feet to carry him to the bedroom, he opened the door, and stepped into the darkened room. His feet carried him forward through the shadows until he reached the side of the bed without his even having to tell them to. Dropping to his knees, he clasped his hands in front of him and silently whispered a prayer asking forgiveness. Barely a moment had passed.

His heart almost stopped when he heard her stand. The sudden, insane thought that she was going to join him passed through his mind before the almost silent slap of her feet against the metal stairs tore the idea to shreds. Holding his breath against the sudden fear that the metal door had somehow not been locked properly, he strained his ears to catch the sound of the door opening, and the pounding of her feet as she tried to flee.

"Let me out!"

Her voice, filled with anger, tore through the silence

of the darkness he knelt in. His heart clenched.

"*Let me out of here!*" the sound of the bars being shaken reached his suddenly heightened senses, and he gripped his hands together so tightly that his nails cut into his skin.

"I DON'T BELONG HERE! LET ME OUT!" Her voice rising.

He clenched his eyes shut.

"*LET ME OUT!*" Her voice a scream of desperation and despair such as he had never heard, he stopped breathing all together.

Silence fell after that.

After what felt like an eternity, he heard her slowly walk back down the stairs, her feet almost silent, but not quite, as they moved across the floor. He didn't need to look to know that she had gone to the corner of the living room that she always slept in. Even if he had wanted to look, he wouldn't have been able to see her without leaving the bedroom. That was probably why she had chosen it.

His jaw ached when he finally forced himself to unclench it. Bowing his head over his hands, his entire body sore—how long had he been sitting there?—he sent another prayer of repentance to the sky, then moved away from the bed so that he could sit on the floor with his back against the wall.

Stretching his legs out in front of him, he tilted his head backwards, and let the tears that he'd been holding back since the explosion that afternoon finally roll from his eyes. He stared up at the ceiling that was

shrouded in shadow, and, with practiced ease, let his mind slip into a projection.

When he next turned his gaze upon the room, he wasn't alone.

Lying on the floor just a few feet away, lay his body, exactly the way it really was, just a room over. Even the smell of the blood lay thick in the air.

Because if it was to be her punishment, then it would be his as well.

"Because no man looks in the mirror and sees a villain."

Finished on 5/8/13, 11:02PM

Uhh...let me just say that in no way, shape, or form, had I planned to write this. It was *completely* spur of the moment, and once the idea got into my head, it wouldn't let go, so, somehow, I managed to churn out 7.5K words in a day and a half. School days, too. That's...pretty insane.

Anyways, I hope you enjoyed, and if you could leave a review telling me that you forgive me for making you all *almost* sympathise with Leoben, that'd be great. Because I half want to forgive him now, which I was totally not expecting.

This...has been an interesting experience, to say the least...

If you would like to read more of these stories,

I've started a little mini (Well, I *say* mini...) series.

Going in chronological order, this is technically the first.

Heroes and Villains

Never Leave You / Moment

Cerberus

Coming soon: Unending